UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Commissioner for Patents
United States Patent and Trademark Office
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450
www.uspto.gov

FISH & RICHARDSON, PC
P.O. BOX 1022
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55440-1022

COPY MAILED

JAN 14 2009

In re Application of:
Wolrich, et al.
Application No. 09/475,614
Filed: December 30, 1999
Attorney Docket No. 10559/137001/P7876
For: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CONTROL OF RECEIVE DATA

ON PETITION

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR 1.183, filed June 19, 2008, requesting waiver of 37 CFR 41.41(1)(2), which permits an applicant to file a reply brief to an examiner's answer within two months from the mail date of the examiner's answer.

The petition is **DISMISSED**.

Any request for reconsideration must be submitted within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are NOT permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition under 37 CFR 1.183." This is **not** a final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 704.

The applicable rules are 37 CFR 41.41(a)(1), which permits an applicant to file a reply brief to an examiner's answer within two months from the mail date of the examiner's answer, and 37 CFR 41.41(c), which states that extensions of time to file the reply brief are not available.

This application is currently under appeal. On April 4, 2008, the Office mailed an examiner's answer to appellants' appeal brief, filed January 28, 2008. There were no new grounds of rejection in the April 4, 2008 examiner's answer. Appellants had two months to respond.

Appellants did not respond until June 19, 2008. Appellants appear to be requesting waiver of the rules based on a docketing error that resulted in the reply brief not being timely filed.

In order for a petition under 37 CFR 1.183 to be granted, petitioner must demonstrate the existence of an extraordinary situation where justice requires waiver of one or more federal

regulations. It is the responsibility of the Director to determine the definitions of the terms "extraordinary" and "as justice requires" as the terms are used in 37 CFR 1.183.[1]

The Director drafted the federal regulations which may be waived including 37 CFR 1.183. The Director is the party responsible for determining when a party has demonstrated that an "extraordinary" situation exists such that "justice requires" waiver of a federal regulation.

In determining when waiver is appropriate, the Office *may* consider the circumstances when courts have exercised their equitable powers to waive requirements of a statute or regulation on behalf of a party. Courts are permitted to waive certain statutory requirements such as time limits.[2] Courts, in determining when waiver is proper, have required due diligence and required more than a "garden variety claim of excusable neglect."[3] The Federal Circuit has stated, "Equitable powers . . . should not be invoked to excuse the performance of a condition by a party that has not acted with reasonable due care and diligence."[4]

---

[1] See Bowles, Price Administrator v. Seminole Rock & Sand Co., 325 U.S. 410, 413-414, 89 L. Ed. 1700, 1702, 65 S. Ct. 1215, 1217 (1945) ("Since this involves the interpretation of an administrative regulation a court must necessarily look to the administrative construction of the regulation if the meaning of the words used is in doubt. . . . [T]he ultimate criterion is the administrative interpretation, which becomes of controlling weight unless it is plainly erroneous or inconsistent with the regulation.")

"In the specialized field of patent law, ... the Commissioner of Patent and Trademarks is primarily responsible for the application and enforcement of the various narrow and technical statutory and regulatory provisions. His interpretation of those provisions is entitled to considerable deference." Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 F.Supp. 900, 904, 16 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA)1876 (D.D.C. 1990), aff'd without opinion (Rule 36), 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991) (citing Morganroth v. Quigg, 885 F.2d 843, 848, 12 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1125 (Fed. Cir. 1989); Ethicon, Inc. v. Quigg, 849 F.2d 1422, 1425, 7 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1152 (Fed. Cir. 1988) ("an agency' interpretation of a statute it administers is entitled to deference"); see also Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837, 844, 81 L. Ed. 694, 104 S. Ct. 2778 (1984) ("if the statute is silent or ambiguous with respect to the specific issue, the question for the court is whether the agency's answer is based on a permissible construction of the statute.")).

[2] See Wood-Ivey Sys. Corp. v United States, 4 F.3d 961, 964 (Fed. Cir. 1993) (Plager, J., concurring) ("Since Irwin [v. Department of Veterans Affairs, 498 U.S. 89, 112 L. Ed. 2d 435, 111 S. Ct. 453, (1990)], compliance with statutory time limits is no longer jurisdictional, in the old sense that when a Congressionally specified time limit had expired a court had no power to entertain the case. The presumption is now to the contrary. The court has jurisdiction to entertain the suit and to determine on the merits if equitable relief from the time bar is warranted.")

[3] See Wiggins v. State Farm Fire and Casualty Co., 153 F. Supp. 2d 16, 21 (D. D.C. 2001) ("A court can equitably toll the statute of limitations . . . plaintiff will not be allowed extra time to file unless he has exercised due diligence, and the plaintiff's excuse must be more than a 'garden variety claim of excusable neglect.'") (citations omitted).

[4] U.S. v. Lockheed Petroleum Services, 709 F.2d 1472, 1475 (Fed. Cir. 1983) (citations omitted) ("Lockheed had several means at its disposal which it could have employed to guarantee compliance with the regulation, yet it neglected to use any of them. Equitable powers . . . should not be invoked to excuse the performance of a condition by a party that has not acted with reasonable due care and diligence."); See also Grymes v. Sanders et al., 93 U.S. 55, 61; 23 L. Ed. 798, 801 (1876) ("Mistake, to be available in equity, must not have arisen from negligence. . . . The party complaining must have exercised at least the degree of diligence 'which may be fairly expected from a reasonable person.') (citing Kerr on Fraud and Mistake, 407); Garcia v. Office of Personnel Management, 2001 U.S. App. LEXIS 21616, 6 (Fed. Cir. 2001) ("Equity will not intervene, however, to protect a claimant from his or her own failure to exercise due diligence in preserving their legal rights.") (citing Irwin v. Department of Veterans Affairs, 498 U.S. 89, 95 (1990)); Goetz & Goetz v. Secretary of Health and Human Services, 2001 U.S. App. LEXIS 943, 5 (Fed. Cir. 2001) ("the special master's finding of a lack of due diligence was not arbitrary, capricious, or an abuse of discretion, and precludes the application of equitable tolling.") (citing Baldwin County Welcome Ctr. V. Brown, 466 U.S. 147, 151, 80 L. Ed. 2d 196, 104 S. Ct. 1723 (1984) which states, "One who fails to act diligently cannot invoke equitable principles to excuse their lack of diligence.")

Factors which may not justify tolling include: pro se status, illiteracy, deafness, lack of legal training, lack of knowledge of the law, lack of knowledge of a legal process, and lack of legal representation.[5]

An attorney's lack of knowledge, misinterpretation of a law, miscalculation of a time period, and failure to exercise due care and diligence will not justify waiver.[6]

A party's inadvertent failure to comply with the requirements of a rule is simply not an extraordinary situation that would warrant waiver of a rule under 37 CFR 1.183.[7]

Petitioners have not provided an adequate showing of "an extraordinary situation" in which "justice requires" suspension of the rules. The explanation in the petition regarding the delay in filing the reply brief is confusing.

The explanation in the petition is that Mr. Ronald Gordon, presumably not a registered practitioner, was instructed to prepare a reply brief, which he allegedly did. Mr. Gordon stated in an email that the reply brief was ready and would be filed on June 4, 2008. However, no one actually prepared the reply brief for filing, as instructed by Mr. Gordon, or approached Attorney Maloney to sign the reply brief.

---

[5] See Felder v. Johnson, 204 F.3d 168 171-172 (5th Cir. 2000) (Pro se status is not "rare and exceptional" circumstance, but is typical of those bringing a 28 U.S.C. § 2254 claim. "Mere ignorance of the law or lack of knowledge of filing deadlines does not justify equitable tolling or other exceptions to a law's requirements.") (citing United States v. Flores, 981 F.2d 231, 236 (5th Cir. 1993) as "holding pro se status, illiteracy, deafness, and lack of legal training are not external factors excusing abuse of the writ."); citing Barrow v. New Orleans S.S. Ass'n, 932 F.2d 473, 478 (5th Cir. 1991) as "holding equitable tolling . . . within the Age Discrimination in Employment Act not warranted by plaintiff's unfamiliarity with legal process, his lack of representation, or his ignorance of his legal rights." (other citations omitted)).

[6] See Harris v. Hutchinson, 209 F.3d 325, 330-331 (4th Cir. 2000) (Plaintiff argues that he relied on "negligent and erroneous advice" of his attorney. Attorney agrees his advice was erroneous. The court holds, "[A] mistake by a party's counsel in interpreting a statute of limitations does not present the extraordinary circumstance beyond the party's control where equity should step in to give the party the benefit of his erroneous understanding.") (citing Taliani v. Chrans, 189 F.3d 597, 598 (7th Cir. 1999) as "holding that a lawyer's miscalculation of a limitations period is not a valid basis for equitable tolling."; citing Sandvik v. United States, 177 F.3d 1269, 1272 (11th Cir. 1999) (per curiam) as "refusing to toll the limitations period where the prisoner's delay was assertedly the result of a lawyer's decision to mail the petition by ordinary mail rather than to use some form of expedited delivery."; citing Gilbert v. Secretary of Health and Human Services, 51 F.3d 254, 257 (Fed. Cir. 1995) as "holding that a lawyer's mistake is not a valid basis for equitable tolling."; other citations omitted.)

[7] See Honigsbaum v. Lehman, 903 F. Supp. 8, 37 USPQ2d 1799 (D.D.C. 1995) (Commissioner did not abuse his discretion in refusing to waive requirements of 37 CFR 1.10(c) in order to grant filing date to patent application, where applicant failed to produce Express Mail customer receipt or any other evidence that application was actually deposited with USPS as Express Mail), aff'd without opinion, 95 F.3d 1166 (Fed. Cir.1996); Nitto Chemical Industry. Co., Ltd. v. Comer, 39 USPQ2d 1778, 1782 (D.D.C. 1994) (Commissioner's refusal to waive requirements of 37 CFR 1.10 in order to grant priority filing date to patent application not arbitrary and capricious, because failure to comply with the requirements of 37 CFR 1.10 is an "avoidable" oversight that could have been prevented by the exercise of ordinary care or diligence, and thus not an extraordinary situation under 37 CFR 1.183); Vincent v. Mossinghoff, 230 USPQ 621 (D.D.C. 1985) (Misunderstanding of 37 CFR 1.8 not unavoidable delay in responding to Office Action); Gustafson v. Strange, 227 USPQ 174 (Comm'r Pats. 1985) (Counsel's unawareness of 37 CFR 1.8 not extraordinary situation warranting waiver of a rule); In re Chicago Historical Antique Automobile Museum, Inc., 197 USPQ 289 (Comm'r Pats. 1978) (Since certificate of mailing procedure under 37 CFR 1.8 was available to petitioner, lateness due to mail delay not deemed to be extraordinary situation).

A delay resulting from an error (e.g., a docketing error) on the part of an employee in the performance of a clerical function may provide the basis for waiver, provided it is shown that: (1) the error was the cause of the delay at issue; (2) there was in place a business routine for performing the clerical function that could reasonably be relied upon to avoid errors in its performance; (3) and the employee was sufficiently trained and experienced with regard to the function and routine for its performance that reliance upon such employee represented the exercise of due care. *See* MPEP 711.03(c)(III)(C)(2).

An adequate showing requires statements by all persons with *direct* knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the delay, setting forth the facts, as they know them. Petitioners must supply a thorough explanation of the docketing and call-up system in use and must identify the type of records kept and the person responsible for the maintenance of the system. The Office would like know who was responsible for each aspect of the docketing and reply system from the time the examiner's answer was received to the time that a reply brief should have been filed. This showing must include copies of mail ledger, docket sheets, filewrappers and such other records as may exist which would substantiate an error in docketing, and include an indication as to why operation of the system did not result in the reply brief being timely filed. Petitioner must also supply information regarding the training provided to the personnel responsible for the docketing error, degree of supervision of their work, examples of other work functions carried out, and checks on the described work which were used to assure proper execution of assigned tasks.

Petitioners are encouraged to file a reconsideration petition under 37 CFR 1.183 that explains, *in specific*, how the docketing and reply system failed in this instance.

Since the petition lacks a showing that this is an extraordinary situation, the petition under 37 CFR 1.183 is subject to dismissal.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail:
Mail Stop PETITION
Commissioner for Patents
Post Office Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By hand:
U.S. Patent and Trademark Office
Customer Service Window, Mail Stop Petition
Randolph Building
401 Dulany Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

By FAX:
(571) 273-8300 - ATTN: Office of Petitions

Telephone inquiries concerning this matter may be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3230

Shirene Willis Brantley

Shirene Willis Brantley
Senior Petitions Attorney
Office of Petitions